

Goose Green and Darwin taken by paratroopers

By Henry Stanhope, Defence Correspondent

Port Darwin, the second biggest settlement in the Falkland Islands and the airfield at Goose Green five miles away were back in British hands last night.

They were recaptured by the Second Battalion of the Parachute Regiment who launched their offensive against the occupying Argentine force before dawn.

It must have been around dusk on the short winter day when the Union Jack replaced the blue and white national flag of Argentina above the tiny conurbation 60 miles down the coast from the capital, Port Stanley.

It was eight weeks to the day since Argentina seized control of the Falklands, whose sovereignty it has disputed for most of the time since Britain established itself there in 1833.

A brief announcement by the Ministry of Defence about 10 pm BST, recorded that the Argentine garrison had suffered casualties and that hundreds of prisoners had been taken. Initial reports of the action suggested that British casualties had been light. Next of kin were being informed.

News of the recapture followed a day of mounting speculation in Whitehall, as radio silence imposed by the task force in the Falklands had the effect of blotting out news of progress.

On Thursday the Prime Minister had announced that part of the task force had started to advance from the beachhead established only a week ago after the amphibious landings at Port San Carlos on Falkland Sound. Then yesterday the Ministry confirmed that "offensive land operations are in progress".

There was little doubt that the objective was Port Darwin and Goose Green, a necessary prelude to the main operation against the Argentine garrison around Port Stanley. But the location of today's battle was confirmed only by a communique from the unlikely source of Buenos Aires.

The first reaction in London was one of surprise that the operation had been completed so quickly and clinically. There was no firm figure for the size of the Argentine garrison at Darwin and Goose Green, but estimates had put it as large as 1,000.

This would be about the strength of the paratroopers

whose normal establishment of 650 would have been fortified by supporting units.

There had been speculation that the next move after the attack on Darwin and Goose Green would be a second amphibious landing, this time by more than 3,000 men of the Fifth Infantry Brigade who recently arrived in the area on the liner Queen Elizabeth 2 and who would now be able to come ashore on the east coast of East Falkland — probably from assault ships like HMS Fearless and Intrepid.

Last night's news of the success at Darwin came after an earlier announcement that four Royal Marines had been killed and about 20 injured in an Argentine air raid over the San Carlos beachhead on

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Thursday. Two of the Argentine Sky Hawks were shot down in the raid. A soldier from the Royal Engineers also died in the battle.

The Ministry also announced that a Harrier jet which was one of those supporting yesterday's operations by the land forces, was hit by Argentine ground fire and that the pilot was seen to eject over enemy occupied territory. His next of kin have been informed.

● Buenos Aires, May 28 — Argentina said that it was suspending air transport agreements with Britain, West Germany, France and the Netherlands within 30 days.

The official news agency Telam said it was because of Britain's armed aggression against Argentina, and the economic sanctions taken by the three other countries against Argentina.

The main British carrier to South America, British Caledonian, has not been operating to Buenos Aires since the task force set sail; passengers have been flying to Brazil or Chile and then transferring to other airlines. However airlines such as Air France, KLM and Lufthansa are likely to be affected by the Argentine ban.

